

Department of the Interior

U.S. Geological Survey

Northwest Climate Science Center

Communication Strategy, 2012-2015

FINAL



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Introduction

The Northwest Climate Science Center (NW CSC) was established by the Department of the Interior (DOI) in 2010 to provide objective scientific information and tools that Northwest managers of land, water, wildlife, and cultural resources can use to anticipate, monitor, and adapt to climate change. The NW CSC is one of eight regional climate science centers managed by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center (NCCWSC) and is a federally led research collaboration hosted by three primary universities: Oregon State University, the University of Idaho, and the University of Washington.

The NW CSC receives guidance from the Executive Stakeholder Advisory Committee (ESAC), which helps identify strategic science priorities and sets the long-term climate-science agenda for the NW CSC (<http://www.doi.gov/csc/northwest/Climate-Science-Agenda.cfm>). ESAC seats are held by representatives from federal, tribal, and state agencies and organizations (<http://www.doi.gov/csc/northwest/ESAC.cfm>).

The goals of the NW CSC are outlined in its Strategic Plan for 2012-2015 (<http://www.doi.gov/csc/northwest/Northwest-CSC-Strategic-Plan.cfm>), which identifies Communication Services as an essential element for achieving the NW CSC's second goal to *develop resources and programs to enhance climate science literacy, and give regional audiences the necessary tools and information to promote climate change awareness*. Specifically, the objective of Communication Services is *to provide professional communication and outreach services that support the exchange of information among regional stakeholders, and effectively raise awareness of climate issues in the Northwest*. To help meet this objective, the NW CSC prepared a Communication Strategy (this document) that will guide NW CSC Communication Services for 2012-2015.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this communication strategy is to describe the overall NW CSC communication goals and specific objectives, the target audiences for these objectives, the possible approaches for effectively communicating with those audiences, and the implementation process and status of the communication strategy as of January, 2013.

Strategy Elements

The communication strategy identifies general communication goals, specific communication objectives by target audience, and possible approaches for meeting those objectives. These strategy elements are described here and summarized in table 1.

Goals

The NW CSC communication strategy has two overarching goals (table 1), which are to:

1. Facilitate development and dissemination of Northwest climate-related science, information, and tools to support management of natural and cultural resources under changing climate conditions; and
2. Increase access to and understanding of Northwest climate-related science and data.

Objectives by Audience

The NW CSC communication strategy identifies seven specific objectives by audience (table 1), which support the general communication goals. The target audiences are scientists; resource managers; legislators, policy makers, and administrators; and the general public. *Scientists* are defined as any scientists with research interests in the Northwest with a focus on USGS and NW CSC university-consortium scientists, scientists at other agencies and institutions who may collaborate with USGS and consortium scientists, other Climate Science Centers (CSCs), and the NCCWSC. *Resource managers* are defined as any natural and cultural resource managers that manage resources in the Northwest with a focus on members of the ESAC (which includes tribal organizations, and federal and state agencies), Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) within the geographic area of the NW CSC, tribes, and stakeholders such as local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private industry. Examples of local governments are counties and cities, and are defined here to include public entities such as public utility districts. Examples of private industry include the timber and shellfish industries. *Legislators, policy makers, and administrators* are defined as members of the U.S. Congress, tribal leaders, members of state legislatures, legislative staff, and agency directors and staff.

Possible Approaches

The NW CSC communication strategy identifies multiple possible approaches for achieving the seven specific objectives (table 1). In general, the possible approaches include active and passive communication techniques. Active techniques are defined as techniques whereby information is delivered to an audience at the initiative of the NW CSC (for example, information is communicated when the NW CSC distributes emails and newsletters). Passive techniques are defined as techniques whereby the initial request for information originates from the audience (for example, information is communicated when a user accesses the NW CSC website, located at <http://www.doi.gov/csc/northwest>). The possible communication approaches shown in table 1 are grouped by priority in recognition of the fact that resources may be insufficient to implement some of the approaches and that not all approaches are equally effective.

Strategy Implementation

The communication strategy will be implemented over time, subject to availability of funding, with initial focus on communications between scientists and natural resource managers (objectives 1, 3, 5 and 6; table 1), and keeping legislators, policy makers, and administrators informed (objective 2). As opportunities arise, the NW CSC will educate the general public about climate-related science (objective 7). Northwest Knowledge Network data services and NW CSC on-line data repositories, which will contain data, interpretive results, and tools generated by NW CSC-funded research, will be highlighted as comprehensive information sources for scientists, resource managers and the general public (objective 4). The NW CSC will leverage and build on communication efforts by other entities, such as LCCs and others within the geographic area of the NW CSC. The implementation status of the NW CSC communication strategy as of January, 2013, is shown in table 1.

The effectiveness of communication approaches will be evaluated by seeking feedback from audiences to determine if adjustments in approaches are warranted. These evaluations may be quantitative and/or qualitative in nature and will focus on outcomes of communication efforts. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation techniques have advantages and disadvantages. For reasons explained below, the NW CSC expects to rely primarily on qualitative evaluation techniques.

Use of quantitative evaluation techniques is appropriate if outcomes of different communication approaches have to be compared, progress needs to be tracked over time, and ample resources are available to conduct and analyze the evaluation. One commonly used metric, for example, is to track the number of visitors to a website and the products they access. However, such a metric does not indicate whether visitors obtain the information they need or, if they do, if the information is presented in a way that enhances their knowledge. Use of qualitative evaluation techniques is appropriate if more nuanced insight is needed into what makes one communication approach more effective than another, feedback is needed quickly, and only limited resources are available to conduct and analyze the evaluation. Qualitative evaluations are expected to be most informative and cost-effective in determining the effectiveness of NW CSC communication approaches; such evaluations are also expected to have the added benefit of nurturing relationships between the NW CSC and stakeholders as the evaluations will be based on two-way conversations. Even so, the NW CSC plans to use quantitative evaluations in addition to qualitative ones whenever their use is appropriate and feasible. As part of qualitative evaluations, the NW CSC will solicit feedback from targeted audience members about various communication approaches and products. Similarly, the NW CSC will solicit audience feedback following presentations, workshops, and other interactive activities it sponsors to evaluate their overall effectiveness. The NW CSC will use all evaluation findings to strengthen its communication approaches and optimize its overall communication strategy.

Table 1. Summary of elements of the Northwest Climate Science Center communication strategy and their implementation status, January, 2013.

[Abbreviations: CSC, Climate Science Center; ESAC, Executive Stakeholder Advisory Committee; LCC, Landscape Conservation Cooperative; NCCWSC, National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center; NGO, Non-Governmental Organization; NW CSC, Northwest Climate Science Center.]

Goal 1: Facilitate development and dissemination of Northwest climate-related science, information, and tools to support management of natural and cultural resources under changing climate conditions		
Objective	Audience	Possible Approaches
<i>Efforts ongoing as of January, 2013, are shown in boldface</i>		
1. Increase scientists' understanding of resource managers' scientific needs and, conversely, increase resource managers' insight into completed, ongoing, and potential future NW CSC research	<p>SCIENTISTS: Includes USGS and NW CSC university-consortium scientists, other potential research partners, other CSCs, NCCWSC</p> <p>RESOURCE MANAGERS: Includes ESAC, LCCs, tribes, federal and state agencies, local governments, NGOs, private industry</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for two-way communication between resource managers and scientists using:</p> <p><i>higher priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * email/listserv * websites¹ * webinars (stored on-line for future viewing) * ESAC meetings * conferences/workshops * face-to-face meetings * annual NW CSC request-for-proposal process * briefing documents/handouts/Fact Sheets * NW CSC Strategic Plan * NW CSC Science Agenda * NW CSC annual workplans * NW CSC annual reports <p><i>lower priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * E-newsletters * social media * podcasts * press releases * blog * field trips

2. Increase understanding of relevance of NW CSC research to policy makers	<p>LEGISLATORS, POLICY MAKERS & ADMINISTRATORS: Includes U.S. Congress, tribal leadership, state legislatures, legislative staff, agency directors and staff</p>	<p>Communicate summaries of research results/updates with particular focus on the relevance of NW CSC work to policy decisions using:</p> <p><i>higher priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * face-to-face meetings with staff of Congress and other elected officials * briefing documents/handouts/Fact Sheets * websites¹ with lay-audience contents (e.g., FAQs, Fact Sheets) * press releases * NW CSC annual workplans * NW CSC annual reports <p><i>lower priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * email/listserv * social media * E-newsletters * articles in lay-audience publications (e.g., guest columns in local papers) * field trips
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3. Increase awareness of NW CSC opportunities for new research, student training/scholarships, and outreach events	<p>SCIENTISTS: Includes USGS and NW CSC university-consortium scientists, other potential research partners, other CSCs, NCCWSC</p> <p>RESOURCE MANAGERS: Includes ESAC, LCCs, tribes, federal and state agencies, local governments, NGOs, private industry</p>	<p>Announce opportunities (e.g., requests for NW CSC research proposals, Climate Boot Camp, NW CSC graduate fellowships, Northwest Climate Science Conference, workshops) using:</p> <p><i>higher priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * email/listserv * websites¹ * conferences/workshops/meetings <p><i>lower priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * E-newsletters * social media
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Goal 2: Increase access to and understanding of Northwest climate-related science and data

Objective	Audience	Possible Approaches
<i>Efforts ongoing as of January, 2013, are shown in boldface</i>		
4. Increase awareness and use of NW CSC on-line data repositories and Northwest Knowledge Network data services	<p>SCIENTISTS: Includes USGS and NW CSC university-consortium scientists, other potential research partners, other CSCs, NCCWSC</p> <p>RESOURCE MANAGERS: Includes ESAC, LCCs, tribes, federal and state agencies, local governments, NGOs, private industry</p> <p>GENERAL PUBLIC</p>	<p>Publicize NW CSC on-line data repositories and Northwest Knowledge Network data services using:</p> <p><i>higher priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * email/listserv * website¹ links to on-line data repositories * briefing documents/handouts/Fact Sheets * webinars <p><i>lower priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * E-newsletters * social media * articles in lay-audience publications (e.g., guest columns in newspapers) * public lectures
5. Increase awareness of NW CSC information, data, and/or research results to help scientists advance current and future research, foster scientific collaboration across disciplines and regions, and leverage resources	<p>SCIENTISTS: Includes USGS and university-consortium scientists, other potential research partners, other CSCs, NCCWSC</p>	<p>Publicize and communicate specific scientific information, datasets, and/or results to a targeted audience of scientists using:</p> <p><i>higher priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * email/listserv * websites¹ * webinars (stored on-line for future viewing) * scientific conferences/workshops * notes/letters in scientific journals * briefing documents/handouts/Fact Sheets <p><i>lower priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * E-newsletters * social media * blog * podcasts

6. Increase synthesis and understanding of "best available science" on Northwest climate-related topics to facilitate its use in resource management decisions	RESOURCE MANAGERS: Includes ESAC, LCCs, tribes, federal and state agencies, local governments, NGOs, private industry	<p>Create opportunities for experts to synthesize and disseminate the "best available science" and publicize and communicate these syntheses and other scientific information, datasets, and/or tools to a targeted audience of resource managers using:</p> <p><i>higher priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * email/listserv * websites¹ * webinars (stored on-line for future viewing) * resource-management conferences/workshops * face-to-face meetings * notes/letters in resource-management journals * briefing documents/handouts/Fact Sheets <p><i>lower priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * E-newsletters * social media * blog * podcasts
7. Increase knowledge and understanding of climate science and in particular the work of the NW CSC	GENERAL PUBLIC	<p>Publicize and communicate Northwest climate science using:</p> <p><i>higher priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * websites¹ with lay-audience contents (e.g., FAQ, Fact Sheets) * press releases <p><i>lower priority:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * email/listserv * E-newsletters * social media * appearances on TV and radio * articles in lay-audience publications (e.g., guest columns in newspapers) * public lectures (e.g., at libraries, environmental organizations, land trusts, community groups, special interest groups such as floodplain managers, planners, zoning officials) * informational booths (e.g., at fairs and festivals, science and technology museums, zoos and aquariums) * educational outreach (e.g., teach teachers, prepare field-trip guidebooks) * field trips * semi-permanent exhibits (e.g., at federal and state parks and campgrounds) * collaborative partnerships (e.g., with educational and environmental organizations)

¹To date (March 2013), the official NW CSC website is located at <http://www.doi.gov/csc/northwest>.